

The effect of urbanisation on teacher training and the number of teachers in Finland 1898-1957

Introduction

Urbanization was a very slow process in Finland, if we compare the number of inhabitants in towns and rural areas. In 1900 the number of townspeople was 12.6 % out of a total 2.6 Million. This rose slowly, to 16.1 % in 1920, to 26.8 % in 1940 and to 38.4 % in 1960, when the total population was 4.4 Million. A parallel process was the development of industry. In 1900 the number of industrial workers was 10.6 % of all manual labourers, in 1920 it was 14.8 % and in 1940 17.8 %. By 1960 this figure had doubled to 38.4 %. These statistics indicate that Finland from 1900-60 was an agriculture country and most people lived in countryside. This kind development is reflected in education, the school system and teacher training.

This paper analyses the effect of urbanization on teacher training and the number of teachers in the period 1898 - 1957. This time span is divided into three periods: 1898 - 1917, 1917 - 39 and 1940 - 1957, and the focus is on elementary school teacher training, which started in 1863. The first decree on elementary schools was approved in 1866, and it meant the establishment of a parallel school system in Finland. Secondary schools had a long history which went back to the 14th century. Secondary school teacher training, however, began in 1864 when the first Normal Lyceum was established.

Tension between towns and rural areas (1899 - 1917)

In the 1890s an attempt was made to develop the primary school system through legislation. In the Diet of 1891 the clergy and peasantry proposed that each municipality would open an elementary school when the number of inhabitants reached a certain level. This so-called regional compulsory education was also supported by the press, but the decision was not yet finalized. The matter was reconsidered in the next Diet, but it was only in 1898 that the decree was eventually accepted. It did not include compulsory education, however, which had earlier been decreed in Norway and Sweden. This decree on school districts obliged rural municipalities to divide the areas under their jurisdiction into schools districts in order to give children between 7 and 14 years of age an opportunity to receive education in their own mother tongue. The school journey was to be no farther than five kilometers. Bilingual municipalities were to set up at least one school district for the linguistic minority group. Though imperfect in many ways, the decree was a big step forward. (Kuikka 1997, 73.) This decree of 1898 had the great effect of increasing the number of pupils, as the table indicates:

| School year | town schools (number of pupils) | rural area schools (number of pupils) |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1900 – 01 | 26 376 | 82 614 |
| 1910 – 15 | 30 418 | 135 162 |
| 1915 – 16 | 41 694 | 152 643 |

Although the number of pupils in rural areas nearly doubled, the number of pupils in towns also increased. Migration to towns continued all the time. (Halila 1949, 62 - 70.)

Increased urbanization was reflected in the establishment of new teacher training colleges (called "Seminars"). The earliest Seminars were founded in towns: in 1863 in Jyväskylä in central Finland, in 1871 in Tammisaari and in 1873 in Uusikaarlepyy in western Finland, and in 1880 in Sortavala in eastern Finland. The same trend continued when four new Seminars were founded. One Seminar was started in Rauma in western Finland in 1896, most of the students coming from the countryside and still in touch with peasant traditions. Another Seminar for male teachers was founded in 1899 in Kajaani and collected students from eastern and northern Finland. Two Seminars for female teachers were established in different towns, in 1896 in Raasepori in western Finland and in 1899 in Heinola in central Finland. One reason for the locations was to ensure that local municipalities had educated teachers in their

elementary school. All these new Seminar towns were small rural towns with student catchment area of less than 100 kilometers from the town. (Halila 1949, 302 - 308, Kuikka 1988, Nurmi 1995.)

But a competition between towns and rural areas had started. Towns especially in southern Finland, aimed to provide advantages, such as higher salaries. They stressed the opportunity for activity and continued study. The Summer university began in 1912 in Jyväskylä and one year later in Turku. This kind of activity had an effect on teachers, and some moved to towns, occasionally to new school. One topic of discussion was whether teachers in towns were "better" than teachers in rural areas. Perhaps they had the better certificates from colleges, but they did not guarantee success as an actual teacher. A shortage of teachers around this time was very marked in north Finland, especially in Lapland. In 1904 a decree was passed which allowed elementary teachers in Lapland the right to count years of service double. Another way was to provide grants for Seminar students in Lapland. (Halila 1949, 284.)

In this period from 1889 to 1917 political tension affected all reform plans related to the Finnish school system. Russian administrators hindered every reform and closely controlled school activity.

The degree of 1921 – the new period (1918 - 39)

The sixth of December 1917 is an important landmark in the development of Finnish schools. Finland was now an independent state, and the Finns had an opportunity to build a school system of their own, based on a sovereign state. The school system would be one of the most important instruments in the development of Finnish society. (Kuikka 1997, 89.)

The Diet had the difficult problem of deciding, what were the main points to develop in the education system. Was it elementary education, vocational education, teacher training or universities? In the background to this discussion were the events of Finnish society at large, for the work of the Finnish Parliament was overshadowed by the Civil War. The gap between political parties widened and hardened. At the same time, the structure of the economy began to change. The land reform of 1918 created a new group of small farmers, and raised the number of those involved in agricultural work almost two million or 65.1 % of the working population. Similarly, industrial output increased, and with it the need for new labour sources. While in 1910 11% of the labour force worked in industry, the number rose to 15 % within a decade. The share of services

increased as well (3.5 %). These changes resulted in more and more people moving into towns. (Suomen Tilastollinen Vuosikirja 1920; Kuikka 1997, 89 - 90.)

The Finnish Parliament regarded elementary education as important, and consequently passed a law on compulsory education in 1921. It ended an earlier principle of voluntary education and brought these in the age group of 7 to 15 years within the sphere of compulsory studies. This law entitled everyone to receive education free of charge, regardless of sex, language or class. To ease the evident strain on local economies, towns were given five years to enforce the law and rural municipalities fifteen. Although the state gave financial assistance for the founding of elementary schools, the local tax burden rose as high as 40 % in some cases. When the peripatetic schools of the church were gradually phased out in the 1920s, municipalities increasingly took on the duty of developing schools. (Kuikka 1977, 91.)

All colleges for elementary school teachers were in towns and had active cooperation with local societies. Teacher training in the 1920s and 1930s was centered on national values which were reflected in the colleges many-sided interest activities. Very popular interests were at that time mother tongue, religion, music, art, literary and oral expression. Students took part on festivals, choir concerts, sport competitions, and so on. Teachers could indeed be called culture workers. (Kuikka 1985.)

Helsinki as the Finnish capital seems to have been very popular among elementary teachers. There were many applicants for teaching positions, which allowed school boards a wide choice when selecting teachers. In practice it meant that an applicant had to have in addition to the teacher's certificate other merits, such as university studies. Particularly in the 1930s competition for teaching positions increased all the time. Why was this? One reason was better salaries than in the rural areas. Another reason was that Helsinki provided opportunities for continuing studies, a range of interests and offered jobs to other members of the family. Some teachers did in fact obtain Master's degrees from Helsinki University, but there were some difficulties about living in Helsinki. One of these was a shortage of housings. Helsinki did not have time to build new buildings; this problem appeared in the 1920s and continued until the 1950s. (Somerkivi 1977, 420 - 421.)

One interesting question in the 1920s was basic education in elementary teacher training. From 1863 all Seminars were based on the elementary school. This uniformity began to break down at the beginning of the 19th century when Seminars organized a year's education to students who

had passed the student matriculation or corresponding studies on secondary schools. The need for teachers was very great. In the 1920s the discussion again arose about basic criteria besides student matriculation for teaching in the middle years of secondary education. On one hand raising the qualifications demanded of teachers was emphasized, but at the same time it was suggested that elementary teachers were a special case, where closeness to pupils and their parents was more important than academic qualifications. Perhaps higher qualifications would, furthermore, reinforce the class struggle. This view was countered by the argument that teacher training could break down the divide between towns and rural areas, encouraging teachers from the countryside to go to town schools and vice versa. It was very important in a small country that citizens were educated and could communicate with each other. (Kuikka 1978, 67 - 68.)

Despite the different opinions, the consensus was reached that teacher trainees should have training at the middle school and student matriculation level. The latter began as a one year student-seminar at the beginning of the 1920s. In 1934 the system was reformed so that elementary teacher training college was closed down and pedagogic institution of higher training was begun at Jyväskylä. However, not all difficulties were overcome in this way. One problem was that most secondary schools were in towns, the network in rural areas being very sparse. Another problem was that the examination in elementary teacher training did not give the teacher trainer the right to study at university. Its minimum requirement for university study was the student matriculation examination. (Kuikka 1978, 168 - 172; Halila 1963, 277 - 278; Nurmi 1990, 23 - 25.)

Old or new guidelines (1940 - 1957)

The Second World War had a great effect in Finland. It started in November 1939, continued for three months and began again in June 1941 and lasted until spring 1945. During the war time the school system expanded. In 1939 - 45 the number of secondary schools increased from 218 to 248. New secondary schools were established in rural areas, which meant that the relative percentage of rural schools increased to 45%. At the same time it indicates both raised motivation and optimism in education. Parents who worked in agriculture, in particular, set their children to secondary schools more than they previously did. Between

1941 - 1945 a school system was even established in the occupied area of East Karelia. The aim was start teacher education for both elementary schools and secondary schools and to educate local teachers in the new curriculum and in new national values. (Kiuasmaa 1980, 335 - 349; Hölsä 2006.)

Finnish society underwent an era of transition after the war. It was marked on the one hand by economic hardships and the war indemnity, and on the other by political instability. But reconstruction was begun with a sense of trust in the future, despite the fact that political instability created strong pressure on domestic policy, and it was more difficult than before to reach a consensus. In the parliament elections of 1945, the political right gained a tiny majority of 2 (101 - 99), and this increased in the following elections in 1948 to sixteen (108 - 92). (Kuikka 1997, 105.)

Two trends can be recognized in the development of the elementary school after 1945. The first was mainly represented by the committee chaired by Alfred Salmela, who was head of the elementary school division in the National Board of Education. Their agenda was to develop the existing school system with a special emphasis on reinforcing the position of elementary schools. The other trend preferred a total reform, i. e. a changeover to comprehensive schools. The basic education for everyone would be provided by four-year elementary schools, after that pupils would continue their studies in intermediate schools. After this schooling they could choose between upper secondary schools, colleges and vocational schools. (Kuikka 1997, 105 - 106.)

The Finnish Parliament discussed both trends in 1948 - 49. The majority of parliament opposed the complete reform and voted against it. The reasons lie in both political and economic factors. Reparations had a great effect on economic development, and a total reform seemed to be too close to the policies of the Finnish People's Democratic Union. (Isosaari 1973, 82 - 89; Kuikka 1997, 107.)

The gradual urbanization of schools was manifested in many ways. In Helsinki, for example, the number of elementary school pupils doubled between 1946 and 1955 to reach a figure of 35 884. There were three factors: the extension of Helsinki, migration from the countryside and the raising of the birth rate. The latter led to discussion about large classes (Somerkivi 1977, 77 - 78), a phenomenon, which appeared in other cities and in the countryside. In practice it meant more new teachers and more new schools.

The National Board of Education had the main responsibility for developing the school system. It aimed to influence teacher training in two ways. One way was to reinforce the status of Seminars whose admission requirements for teacher trainees were completion of elementary schooling and for some Seminars intermediate school education. The National Board supposed that most students came from the countryside and would go back to teach in schools in the rural areas. Another way was to establish new teacher training colleges. The first began in 1947 in Helsinki, the second in 1949 in Turku and the third in 1953 in Oulu. The admission requirement was the school matriculation examination. The training was two years long. Although teacher training increased quickly, there were no plans to educate separately teachers for rural areas and for towns. Many students who came from towns moved to teach in schools in rural areas, and vice versa. In other words, new teacher training colleges did not cause problems in the urbanization process. (Nurmi 1990.)

School administrators and some politicians wanted to stop migration from the countryside by reforming the curriculum of rural schools in order to reinforce the pupils' of the home area and the natural environment. New textbooks were published which contained information on agriculture and other professions in the countryside. The great increases in pupil numbers led to pressures to build new schools, but most communes lacked the economic resources and many schools were housed in accommodation in sports halls, small cottages, meeting houses, and so on. However, by the end of the 1950s most pupils went to a proper school. (Somerkivi 1977, 337 - 342.)

Conclusions

Urbanization did not have such a great effect on teacher training as one would have wished. Although all Seminars and teacher training colleges were established in towns, most of them were very small and located in the middle of rural areas. Most students were less than 100 kilometers from the Seminar town, so they maintained a close contact with their home area. On the other hand, these years saw an increased sense of unity concerning the Finnish national culture. In the times when Finland was an autonomous duchy culture was the very basis of Finnish identity, and later in the 1920s and 1930s teacher education stressed three values: home, religion and one's native land. Students at Seminars

wanted to build their own independent country, and from the 1920s onwards cultural activity greatly increased. One factor here was that Finnish did not have separate colleges for town teachers and for rural area teachers. During the period of teacher training students interacted and differences between town and rural values diminished. Seminar towns likewise offered many opportunities to develop cultural activities and cooperation.

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